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Director's Daily Brief

7 June 1999

Colombia: Despeje Central to Peace Process

- ◆ President Pastrana's primary motive for continuing despeje is to sustain peace negotiations.
- ◆ FARC using stewardship to reposition/augment forces, build up intelligence/logistic capabilities, and train.
 - 2,000-3,000 FARC combatants located in/around despeje...threefold increase since Nov '98 creation.
- ◆ No significant rise in drug activity detected.
 - Only 3% of Colombia's primary coca growing areas fall within zone.
 - Few cocaine processing labs identified.
 - Narcotrafficking-associated airfields have decreased 20%.
- ◆ FARC unlikely to expand drug-related activities in despeje... want to avoid appearance of using peace process as cover for criminal activity.



Intelligence Community Brief

Colombia's *Despeje*: Central to the Peace Process

Key Points

President Pastrana's extension of the *despeje* or demilitarized zone in southern Colombia for a third time underscores the essential role he believes it plays in sustaining the peace process. The decision prompted the Defense Minister to resign and severely strained relations with the military, who are insisting they be given a greater voice in the peace process.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is using its stewardship of the *despeje* to reposition and augment its forces in an unconstrained environment, build up intelligence and logistic capabilities, and train its political cadre. The FARC has increased its presence in the area at least threefold, but such practices as forced recruitment, arbitrary detention, and extortion hamper efforts to build popular support.

No significant increase in drug activity has been detected in the *despeje* since it was first established in November 1998:

- Only 3 percent of Colombia's primary coca growing areas fall within the zone, although some new coca cultivation has been reported in the northeast.
- Relatively few cocaine processing laboratories have been identified; four laboratories were destroyed by the police shortly after the *despeje* was created.

Although Pastrana appears willing to tolerate the FARC's current level of drug-related and political activity in the *despeje*, a significant increase in either could prompt him to forcibly reestablish a government presence in the area.

This brief was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for Latin America. It was coordinated with CIA, DIA, State/INR, NSA, NIMA, and USSOUTHCOM.

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The *Despeje* and the Peace Process

In September 1998, President Pastrana and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) agreed to create a *despeje* in southern Colombia by removing all government security forces from five municipalities for a period of 90 days. It is a remote region about twice the size of El Salvador but with only some 90,000 inhabitants. The purpose of the *despeje* was to provide the FARC with a safe place to engage in peace talks. []

The *despeje* was established on 7 November and extended in February for another 90 days. In May, Pastrana and the FARC agreed to renew the *despeje* and enter into substantive peace negotiations based on a 12-point agenda of political, economic, and social reforms. Although this third extension was initially set to last 30 days, Peace Commissioner Victor Ricardo has said it would continue as long as peace talks showed progress. President Pastrana has yet to clarify how long it will last. The extension upset the military, prompting Defense Minister Lloreda to resign and many senior officers to consider resigning in protest over the President's handling of the peace process. []

Analysts believe Pastrana's primary motivation for continuing the *despeje* is to sustain peace negotiations—his administration's top priority. Meanwhile, the FARC's control of the zone, which it insists is indispensable to continued peace negotiations, allows them to consolidate their influence over the five municipalities and gives them a political stage for dealing with visiting dignitaries, civic groups, and the media. []

Limited Drug Activity

Although the *despeje* is situated in southern Colombia—the source of over 75 percent of the world's cocaine supply (see map)—[]

[] only a small proportion of coca cultivation occurs in the zone. [] last year that four of the five municipalities have very limited drug-related activity while the fifth, San Vicente del Caguan, has a greater amount. [] since the *despeje* was created suggests that drug-related activity is occurring but has not increased significantly. []

Cultivation.

[] the area contains only minimal and widely scattered coca plantings:

- Only 3 percent of Colombia's primary coca growing areas fall within the zone.¹
- There is virtually no opium poppy cultivation in the *despeje*. []

¹ The primary coca growing area is defined as those regions where the majority of the coca crop is located. []

[redacted]
new coca cultivation in the northeast section of the *despeje*. The extent and significance of the cultivation in this area are not yet clear. [redacted]

Processing. [redacted]
[redacted]

Fewer than 100 suspected base and cocaine refining laboratories have been identified in the *despeje* in recent years, as compared to the thousands of laboratories known or suspected to be operating throughout the country. [redacted]
[redacted]

- Shortly after the *despeje* began, the Colombian National Police destroyed four drug-processing laboratories in the area and seized 1.8 tons of finished cocaine—about 4 percent of such seizures in 1998—[redacted]
[redacted]

- In April [redacted] seized several truckloads of precursor chemicals bound for the *despeje*. [redacted]

Transportation. [redacted]

25 airfields in the *despeje* and its vicinity appear operational—roughly 20 percent less than in late 1998. [redacted]
[redacted]

Increased Guerrilla Activity

Presence. The FARC has about 2,000 to 3,000 combatants (out of a total force of 7,000 to 11,000) located in and around the *despeje*. This represents at least a threefold increase since the *despeje* was created last fall. [redacted]

Drug-Related Activity. [redacted]

[redacted] the FARC is providing guidance to coca farmers in the *despeje* on cultivation, regulating to whom coca can be sold, and collecting commissions on cultivation and cocaine processing. This probably does not represent a significant change in FARC policy. [redacted]

Military/Political Activity. The FARC is using its stewardship of the *despeje* to reposition and augment its forces in an unconstrained environment, build up intelligence and logistic capabilities, and train its political cadre, [redacted]

[redacted] Improvements have been made to a road leading from San Vicente del Caguan southeast to an area where many airfields are located; it could support narcotics or logistic activities. [redacted]

FARC measures to assert control over the civilian population, for example, by compelling local inhabitants to work on FARC civic projects such as road construction, continue to hamper efforts to build popular support:

- Reports from the press [redacted] relate a string of FARC abuses in the *despeje*, including expelling a mayor, forcibly recruiting minors, arbitrarily detaining people, and extorting assets from merchants and landowners. [redacted]

Despeje Central to Peace Strategy

Pastrana appears intent on engaging the insurgents in a dynamic process that would undercut their rationale for fighting and eventually make them more susceptible to external political pressure. He appears to have calculated that

extending the *despeje* is essential to sustaining this dialogue. This has led to several decisions that have appeared contradictory:

- Pastrana [redacted] [redacted] prohibited flights over the area in response to complaints from the insurgents, blunting Bogota's ability to mount counterdrug and surveillance operations in the sparsely populated and remote area.
- He publicly admonished the FARC for excesses that he says violate standing agreements, but most observers doubt that Bogota ever established specific ground rules with the insurgents. [redacted]

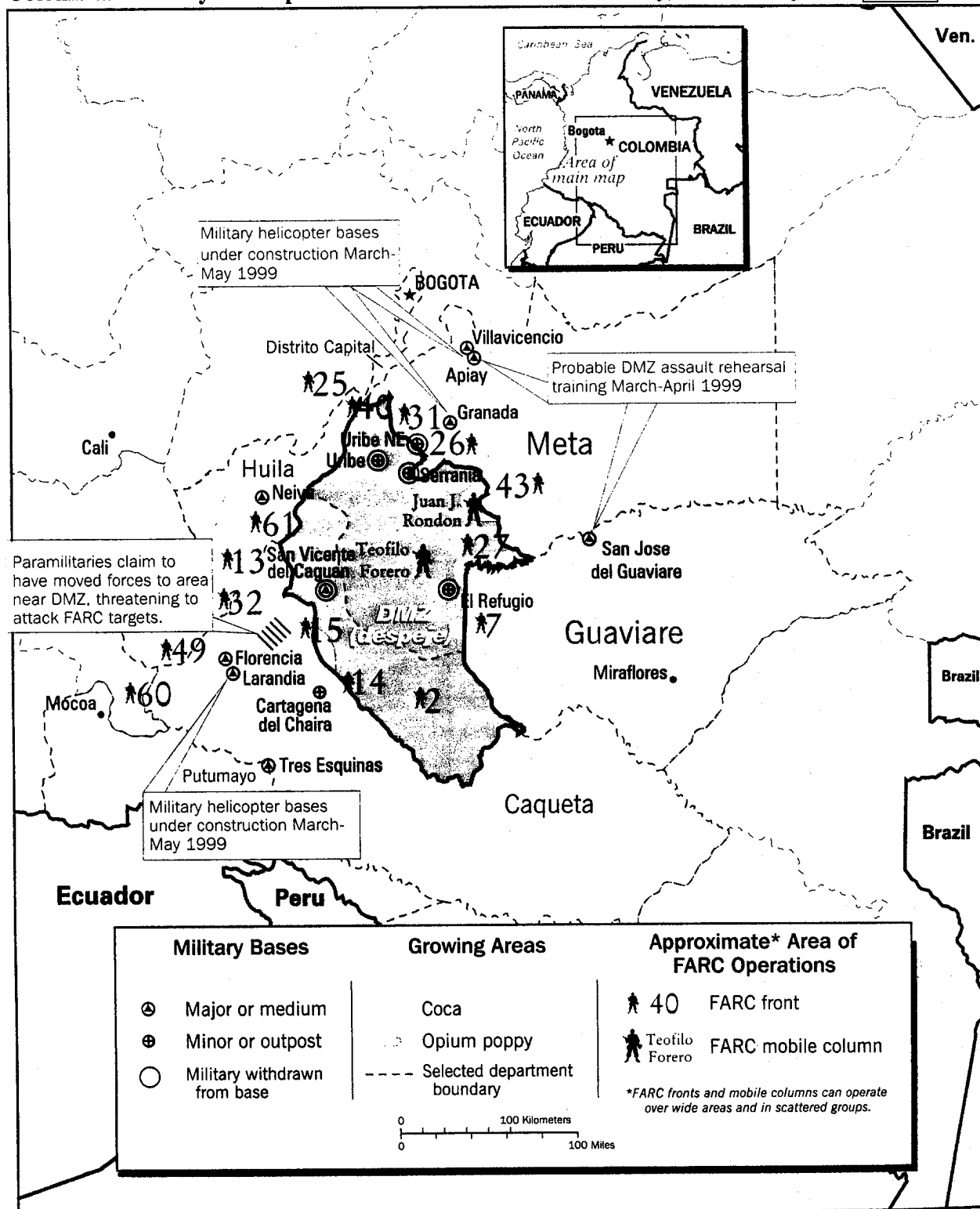
This approach has been perceived by the military as too concessionary, severely straining relations—but not to the point that senior officers would consider taking extraconstitutional actions. Public opinion surveys also reflect widespread unease with the President's handling of the peace process and its failure to generate tangible results. Pastrana is under strong pressure to find ways to mollify the military—probably by integrating it more effectively into the peace process—while assuring the FARC that the *despeje* will continue as long as peace talks remain productive. [redacted]

Negotiations are expected to be long, difficult, and prone to fits and starts—largely because of intense mutual distrust, the government's weak negotiating position, and insurgent resistance to a cease-fire:

- The FARC most likely will use the talks to pursue immediate goals, including a prisoner exchange, continued government pressure on paramilitary groups, and funding for a FARC-managed alternative development program in the zone.

- Pastrana probably will press the FARC to curtail its more egregious behavior, such as kidnapping civilians, attacking the national infrastructure, and collaborating with narcotics traffickers.

Colombia: Military Developments in the DMZ (Despeje) Vicinity, March-May 1999



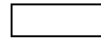
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Both sides probably will use this time to develop long-term, comprehensive negotiating strategies and improve military capabilities.



Outlook for the *Despeje*

Within the *despeje*, the FARC is unlikely to expand drug-related activities largely because they want to avoid the appearance of using the peace process as a cover for criminal activity. Some drug-related activity probably will continue because the FARC does not want to risk losing the support of local coca farmers and traffickers who operate in the zone. The FARC, however, garners most of its drug-related revenue from activities outside the zone and might support some decrease in cultivation in the *despeje*, if the government agreed to fund a FARC-led alternative development program.



The FARC probably will continue to indoctrinate and mobilize inhabitants on its behalf. Recruitment will remain a high priority. The FARC may have to temper its activities if the proposed international accompanying commission is allowed free access to the *despeje*.



Government Options. Although Pastrana appears willing to tolerate the current level of drug-related and political activity in the *despeje*, a significant increase in either could cause him to terminate the *despeje* and order security forces to forcibly reestablish a government presence. Other developments that could propel Pastrana to use military force include the FARC's use of the *despeje* to stage attacks on nearby military or police bases, reports of major human rights abuses or terrorist acts committed by the FARC in the *despeje*, an escalating conflict involving the FARC and paramilitary groups in the zone, and the termination of the peace process.

